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Irish officials respond to Vatican letter

by Sarah Mac Donald by Catholic News Service



Ireland's Prime Minister Enda Kenny is pictured at a news conference following a meeting of European leaders in Brussels in June. (CNS photo/Reuters)

DUBLIN -- Irish government officials planned to meet in early September to discuss the Vatican response to criticisms by Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny over the findings of an Irish judicial report on the handling of clerical sex abuse.

Kenny said Sept. 3 he wanted to read the Vatican's response -- issued that day -- before responding officially. However, in a row that shows little sign of abating, Kenny said he did not regret his July 20 remarks to the Irish parliament in which he accused the Vatican of attempting to "frustrate an inquiry in a sovereign, democratic republic as little as three years ago."

The Vatican, in its 11,000 word response, described Kenny's claim as unfounded and said the Irish prime minister had "made no attempt to substantiate" it.

The Irish government's Cloyne Report was issued July 13 and said then-Bishop John Magee of Cloyne

paid "little or no attention" to safeguarding children as recently as 2008. But the report also accused the Vatican of being "entirely unhelpful" to Irish bishops who wanted to implement stronger norms for dealing with accusations and protecting children.

Addressing parliament July 20, Kenny said the Cloyne Report "excavates the dysfunction, disconnection, elitism and the narcissism that dominate the culture of the Vatican to this day."

A few days later, the Vatican took the unusual move of recalling its nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, saying it signaled how seriously the Vatican took the government criticisms and how intent the Vatican was on drafting a comprehensive response to the report and the prime minister's accusations.

Speaking to the media Sept. 5, Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore said the Vatican's formal response had missed the point.

"There was the most horrific sexual abuse of children perpetrated by clerics. The Catholic Church did not deal with that as it should have dealt with it. Let's not be distracted. Let's not miss the point," he said.

Gilmore also decried the Vatican's response as "very technical and legalistic."

Speaking at the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Dublin, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said: "The Vatican responded to the questions they were asked, and some of the questions were about norms and legislation. It is a bit unfair to say that they gave technical answers -- they were technical questions."

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In its response, the Vatican showed a cautious openness to the Irish government's proposal to introduce legislation making it a criminal offense to withhold information about child sexual abuse. The Vatican said it supports any measure that would contribute to the protection of children.

However, the Holy See qualified the comment, saying it could not comment more fully on the proposed legislation without knowing the details of it, and it specified that information conveyed within the seal of the confessional would have to remain secret.

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